

2 ~~10~~ Z.c
10

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,
At St. *MARY's*,

ON
ACT SUNDAY in the FORENOON,
July 7. 1754.

By WILLIAM SHARP, D.D.
Principal of *Hertford* College.

Publish'd at the Request of the Vice-Chancellor,
and Heads of Houses.



O X F O R D,

Printed at the THEATRE for JAMES FLETCHER in the
Turl; and Sold by J. and J. RIVINGTON in *St. Paul's*
Church-Yard, *London*. M DCC LIV.



To the Reverend
DR. HUDDSFORD
VICE-CHANCELLOR of the
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,
And to the Rest of the
HEADS of HOUSES,

The following DISCOURSE
(Preach'd and Publish'd with Intentions full of
Regard to Themselves and to the Univerfity)

Is

with the utmoft Esteem

and Affection

Inſcrib'd

By the AUTHOR.

ROM. XIV. 16.

Let not then your Good be evil spoken of.

THE benevolent and social Spirit of Christianity has been observ'd oftentimes to its Honour, and is, no doubt, its just and distinguishing Commendation. This, I think, is discernible in every different View of it; its Doctrines have all of them a Tendency, more or less immediate, to this end; the Patterns it proposes to our Imitation are of the same amiable and friendly sort; then the Preceptive parts of our Religion abound every where with the warmest recommendations of Charity, and affectionate Concern for our Fellow-Creatures, in which the Perfection of Christianity is frequently said to consist. Nor is Humanity in the higher and nobler Offices only inculcated with much earnestness in holy Scripture, but regard is had to the slightest Appearance and smallest Circumstances of our good Actions; to whatever may in the remotest manner serve to conciliate Men's Hearts, and knit them close to-

A

gether

gether in Charity, *the very bond of Perfectness*. In a word, what we may call the Lesser Morals make no inconsiderable part of our Religion's care; whereby *the Man of God* is not only furnished unto all good Works, but is taught likewise the most unexceptionable engaging Manner of performing them; is call'd upon, by every prudent method of Consideration and Caution, to recommend and grace his good Actions; to give Virtue its full Force; to procure it its proper Acceptation; and to add to what is comely *a yet more abundant Comeliness*.

The Words above-recited are one Instance among many of what I have been asserting; wherein Christians, *living in a crooked and perverse Generation*, are exhorted *to shine as Lights in the World*; to *make their Righteousness as clear as the Light*; and to free their good Actions from any such Spots or Obscurities as the watchful Eye of Envy or Obloquy may wish to spy in them: and the Intent, no doubt, is this — That Virtue may thus stand forth in its true genuine Lustre; and Men be led first to approve, and then to imitate, what they see so amiable in Another's Conduct; and that Harmony and Charity the meanwhile may unite and cement Christian Hearts.

The

The Exhortation in its primary intention was special, I do suppose, and had respect to a State of things likely enough to subsist, and which we find actually subsisting, in a Society of new Christian Converts. Some of these, (whether of a wiser Judgement or a warmer Confidence, the Apostle does not say which, but) Men fond of their Christian Liberty ran to the utmost Line of it, and discarding all little Scrupulosity about Meats and Drinks ate and drank indifferently of whatever was set before 'em; and of Days and such-like Distinctions made no manner of Account, looking with much Unconcernedness on these lesser Matters. Others, (weak Brethren the Apostle stiles them, and perhaps we might do so too, but at least) Persons of a more cautious and timid Temper, so far from doing such things themselves, could not endure to see others do them, but took grievous Offence thereat, and thought the worse not only of the Men, but of the Religion, that could seem to give warrant to such Licence. The Consequence was no other than might be expected; Men's Hearts were alienated from each other; Charity waxed cold among Christian Brethren; and what was worse, Christianity itself (as will always be the case) lost Credit amidst these Diffensions.

'Twas an Occasion worthy the Apostle's Interposition ; and therefore He, who so well knew how to accommodate Himself to every Exigence, and to be *All Things to All Men*, most suitably and seasonably interposes this candid Remonstrance, address'd to the offending Parties—*Let not then your Good be evil spoken of*: Be cautious of exposing yourselves and your good Actions to Slanders and Suspicions, easy to be avoided: Learn, for this purpose, to abstain altogether from things, if not unlawful, yet in the present Circumstances inexpedient ; and what is too Good to be given up, be content however to guard, and explain, and vindicate from Misconstruction: Do this for your Own Sake, for Other's Sake, for Religion's Sake ; that you may preserve thereby the good Word and good Opinion of Mankind, which will always be worth your having ; that you may remove needless Offences and Uneasinesses out of a weak Brother's way ; and be no longer the Occasion that Men *blaspheme that worthy Name by the which you are called*: Do this, I say, on all these Accounts ; and be assur'd, that as, *whilst you wound these weak Consciences, you sin against Christ*, so by a tender Regard towards them you act conformably to His Will and His Example ; and
that

that such Conduct, in the right Notion of it, is not Meanness but Magnanimity, is not Servility but Charity, and truly Christian Condescension.

Such was the Apostle's Exhortation, and the State of Things that first gave occasion to it: but 'twere Wrong done to so good Advice, to confine it to those Cases only where Religion happens to be concern'd, or to any particular Seasons or Circumstances how important soever. It is calculated and design'd, no doubt, (as most other His special Directions are) for general Use and Observance; and will unquestionably be wise Counsel as long as the World lasts; or whilst there shall be such Things as Misapprehension and Mistake, Weakness and Wilfulness, Want of Candour and Want of Caution remaining amongst Men.

But before we proceed to speak further of explaining and guarding our good Actions, agreeably to the Advice here given us, it may be proper to say something for the better Explanation of the Advice itself, not otherwise secure from Misconstruction. For as the best Actions are liable to be misreported and slander'd by evil Tongues, so are the plainest Words to be misinterpreted by weak Judgements; and as
clear

clear and certain as the Precept of the Text is, there may yet be found some perverse enough to object to it, as proposing Impossibilities, and things plainly out of our Power: Forasmuch as Men's Tongues, they may say, are their own, and as free to speak evil as to speak at all; and that, how exact and exemplary soever our Conduct be, small Impression is likely to be made on uncharitable and evil Hearts, *out of the Abundance of which the Mouth will speak evil Things.* All this may be true, no doubt, and our Apostle must needs know it to be so, having Himself met with His Share of malicious and cruel Treatment, and maintain'd an invincible Courage and Constancy amidst *evil Report and good Report.* The utmost He could possibly intend then by the Precept now under Consideration was, to excite us to a due measure of Care and Circumspection in our whole Conduct, to the use of all the proper Means in our power to prevent Scandal, and stop the mouths of Detractors: And as upon another Occasion, where He exhorts *Timothy*, in a like form of Words, to *Let no Man despise Him*, the plain Meaning is, that He should be most diligent to do nothing deserving of Contempt; so to direct us here, *Not to let Our Good be evil spoken of*, is to bid us, in other Words, to do all that in us lies
to

to cut off Occasions of Misreport, to clear up our Conduct to Satisfaction, and to maintain, what we may term, a Right Understanding among Brethren; which when we have done with an honest and hearty Endeavour, and to the utmost of our Power, we have done our Part, all that Christianity or Good Conscience require of us; and from thenceforth let Calumny rail on, to its own Confusion and to the Praise of Virtue; which tho' it may rob of some portion of its present Comfort, yet will it not fail in the End to enhance its Reward.

Towards fulfilling the Precept, in this View of it, with better prospect of Success, it may conduce perhaps to enquire, *First*, How it comes to pass, that *Good* of every sort is so subject to be *evil spoken of*; or to what accountable Causes it may be owing, that, with regard to the World's good Word, Virtue is so often found not only in neglected Case, but, which is sad to think of, in a Condition of at least equal Disadvantage with Vice itself. For discovering the Causes whence any Evil springs seems the ready way to prevent or put a stop to it; but should this prove insufficient in the present Case, we may carry on our Enquiry, and consider, *Secondly*, What is the prudent Part, where *Good* happens
to

to be *evil spoken of*; or how Virtue ought to demean itself under the hard circumstance of unmerited Reproach: after which shall follow the Application where it may be likely to have best Effect.

Our *First* Enquiry shall be then, how it comes to pass, that *Good* of every sort is so subject to be *evil spoken of*. That ill Things should be ill spoken of is an Event congruous and fitting, such as may fairly be expected, and what it were absurd and fruitless to set about to prevent. Let Vice be censur'd and sham'd out of the World, as it deserves to be; but that Virtue should share the same Fate is not so easy to endure, or to account for — Of Things rare and uncommon to be met with we are usually dispos'd to think favourably and to speak kindly, and the bare circumstance of Scarceness shall be sufficient oftentimes to procure Acceptance to a Thing with not a grain of Merit or Recommendation discernible in it besides. And may not Virtue, I would ask, be reckon'd among the scarce Things of these our Times? I mean no disparagement to the Times in respect of former ones, neither would I compliment them at the expence of Truth; allow them as Good as they have generally been, still may Virtue, I conceive, when compar'd

compar'd with its Opposite more especially, be deem'd a rare Thing; and, by the rule of Rarity, might therefore expect better Entertainment than is commonly given it. But what is a Circumstance so advantageous to most Things else, will be found a Prejudice and sore Hindrance unto Virtue. To speak plainly and to the purpose at once — That which is proper to a Few will be wanting in the Many; and such Deficiency being apt to be felt, where there is any Feeling, puts Men out of Humour, first with themselves, and afterwards with others to whom they owe their Uneasiness. There is somewhat in Human Nature, generous enough in the Design but mischievous now and then in the Application, somewhat impatient of superiour Excellence; which, tho' intended to push Men on to laudable Pursuits, and to the Attainment and Imitation of what is valuable in others, takes oftentimes a different turn, and puts them upon lowering and bringing down to their own level what they want the Spirit and Resolution to be like. To copy after good and virtuous Actions requires Pains, for the most part, and the uneasy conquest of some irregular Desire; but to defame and vilify such good Actions is one of the easiest things in the World, and is practis'd accordingly with a very unhappy degree of Success,

B

cess, requiring little else than what base dishonest Minds are usually well supplied with, Malice in good abundance, with a moderate proportion of wicked Cunning.

Thus are the Ill-natur'd and Envious, no contemptible Number, in a state of continual Enmity against Virtue, ready upon all occasions, and often without occasion, to call it ill Names, or do it unkind Turns. Nor are these the only Adversaries it has to guard against; there are others of a yet more determin'd Virulence, and actuated by a keener spirit of Revenge: Those, I mean, are the Immoral and Vicious, to whom an exemplary Conduct has the force of a standing Accusation or Reproach. *Master, so saying thou reproachest Us*; was the Language of One feeling the Truth of the Reflection past; the like Sentiment does silent Virtue suggest to many a wicked Heart susceptible of such Impressions; and no wonder, if thus irritated, as it were, and under the circumstance of a suppos'd Provocation, Men be forward to quit Scores, and to repay Reproaches with Interest. The Truth is, so long as Virtue holds in Esteem and Reputation, Vice must pass its time but ill, and will have much ado to keep itself in Countenance; in which uneasy Situation 'tis but natural,

[11]

tural, and looks like a sort of necessary Self-defence, to recompence the ill Office, and endeavour to weaken the Influence and Authority which keeps it under, and shews it in a light of so much Disadvantage. Upon this Score Virtue has to encounter often with evil Tongues; and, much Wit and Wickedness have been employ'd to ridicule, and, which is a stranger Attempt still, to reason it out of the World; wherein one sees an Art and an Affiduity that are very surprizing in some Persons.

But even in Cases where there is no such Interference, *Good* often has been, often will be *evil spoken of*, we must expect. — Some will do it in meer Ignorance, knowing little or no Difference between Good and Ill, and consequently making none in their accounts and reports of them; Others of very Wantonness, with no set purpose of Mischief, but in compliance perhaps with the Vogue, or in supply of vacant Conversation, or the like pressing Occasion. — Some, purely to gain Credit and Acceptance to their Reports, (which being of the Evil sort are sure almost to be well received) or to give an air of Importance to their Persons, affect much to be finding Fault: For, I know not how, a grave and solemn Censure, pronounc'd with good assurance,

has a way of making some Folks look Significant, that would be otherwise but inconsiderable, and seem to themselves and others of no indifferent Account. — Some, finding or fancying in themselves a Talent for Ridicule, will indulge it out of measure, regardless of Distinctions, and caring little who's the Sufferer or what the Sacrifice, so long as they have but the Credit and Commendation of the Jest. — Some, from capricious Dislikes of their Own, or officiously adopting the Dislikes of Others, call Things by their wrong Names; looking perhaps to find their Account in Scandal, and, when so, being of all others the most immoderate in the Use of it: and not a Few, I'm afraid, for meer Mischief's sake, and from a strange Pleasure they take in speaking Evil and doing Evil, propagate base Slanders, and *shoot out their Arrows, even bitter Words*. — Then little differences of Denomination, or differences of Opinion, or similar Pretensions, or eager Competitions often come in the way; all or any of which will *whet* Men's *Tongues like a Sword*, and give a notable Keeness and Activity to their Malice. Meanwhile good and virtuous Men, good themselves, and no ill Wishers to other's Good, yet being too cautious and sparing in their Defence of it, licence the Multitude of Detractors, and indirectly,

ly, however undefignedly, *give Occasion to the Enemy to blaspheme.*

Nay and, it may be asked, is not *Good evil spoken of* Itself frequently in fault, furnishing handle and occasion for Suspicions or Reflections? I know not but it sometimes may — As in good Sense there is observ'd to be oftentimes a mixture of the Severe, so in Virtue, not uncommonly, we discern a like degree of Austerity, a Stiffness and Unpliability, not loving to stoop to bye and inferiour Regards, and manifesting itself in a Neglect or even a fastidious Contempt of Appearances and lesser Circumstances. Conscious of its good Meaning, and having the testimony of its own honest Heart, it is apt to look no farther, and to set too light by what the World thinks or says, as of no manner of importance either to Virtue or to Happiness. The World, the exceptious part of it, is as apt to resent the Neglect, and, laying hold of some unguarded Circumstance or other, to misreport what is Good; and in this manner often spoils both its Credit and Effect by giving it a wrong Turn or Appellation.

Thus may *Good be evil spoken of* by its own Negligence or Default; by not attending to Circumstances,

cumstances, small perhaps in themselves, but of special use to conciliate Favour; which Malice will be sure to take advantage of, and the more candid Interpreter, doubting whether or no all be right, and seeing the Party's own Unconcern, will therefore be the less forward and sollicitous to defend. There is, in short, so wrong a Way of doing right, such an untoward and ill-contriv'd Manner of performing the best Actions, peculiar to some Persons, that the Benefit is often lost both to the Objects and the Authors of them; and Good-nature Itself has much ado on such Occasions to refrain from being severe.

But tho' that be not the Case, and our Good be most free from Exceptions of this Sort, yet may it be exceptionable still; either as being defective, in degree suppose, and short of what our Capacities and Circumstances requir'd of us on the Occasion; or else as defective in kind, and having somewhat of Alloy and Ill-mixture in its composition. For when all's done, I doubt there will be found Flaws and Imperfections belonging to our Best Actions; which tho' Candour might be willing to overlook, Ill-nature knows not how to spare, but will take special Account of these, and be ready to denominate the Whole Action from them. Or tho' a Particular

cular Act may be too good to be found Fault with, yet 'tis odds but there's somewhere a Failure in the Character, some Weak Side capable of being expos'd; which Malice can be most sagacious in discovering, with much dexterity confound with what is good, and by means of *a little Leaven leaven the Whole Lump*. Or lastly, which is a rare Case indeed, should the Character be so unblameable throughout, as to be Itself above the reach of unrighteous Malice; even then it may be attack'd, very successfully, in the Crowd, and compriz'd under the general Scandal, thrown often, without distinction, upon whole Communities of Men: for Malice is sometimes most comprehensive in its Aim, and loves dearly to spread the Scandal broad; inverting the rule of Divine Vengeance, and blasting a whole City for the Few Unrighteous that may be found therein.

By all these, and by many more Ways, known only to the Malicious themselves, does Good lie open to injurious Aspersions; which to escape entirely may be the singular good Fortune of a few, but is too rare a Privilege for any one to depend upon. The more probable Issue we should expect and provide against; and to this purpose it may be useful to enquire farther, what
Methods

Methods are most likely to prevent *Good from being evil spoken of*; or, in case of ill Accident, to put a stop to it; or, in failure of this Endeavour also, what Prudence yet directs to be done on our Part, and how Virtue ought to demean itself under the hard circumstance of unmerited Reproach.

I have said before and will suppose still, that the World's good Opinion is at all times worth the having; at the rate of dishonest or undue Compliance, I do not mean; (for if we *value the Praise of Men, the Praise of God is greater*, and will admit of no comparison when they come into Competition) but in the way of virtuous and laudable Endeavour it is worthy to be sought after; and to wish to be well spoken of for what we have done well is a wise and rational Aim, and what the strictest rules of Simplicity and Modesty allow us to purpose to ourselves. It serves for a comfortable Assurance, added to our own Conscience, that we have done well, and is a most efficacious Incitement to a Continuance in well doing; it enlarges our Importance, and Ability to do Good, and to promote the Acceptance and Furtherance of whatever is good in the World: on all which accounts if Esteem and good Name may fitly be desir'd,

desir'd, for the same, or for stronger reasons, should Obloquy and odious Imputation be industriously avoided by us; as producing Effects the very reverse of the former, in a like or even larger proportion; as obstructing the Success and Progress of Virtue in general, throwing Difficulties and Disappointments in the way of particular good Actions, and damping that Satisfaction and Complacency of Mind, which are no inconsiderable part of their Reward. For however Virtue may wrap itself up in its Sufficiency, and expect Enjoyment compleat from abstracted Contemplations on its own Perfections, yet without some social Supports and Regards its Satisfaction, I fear, will be but few and slender; this at least we may be certain of, that if Esteem and good Name can make but small Addition to our Happiness, Reproach and Contempt, how causeless soever, will prove very uncomfortable Abatements of it; such as we are concern'd, for our own Peace sake, if possible, to prevent.

Now the best and only Method I know of preventing them, after taking Care that our Conduct be right, is to see that it be discreetly and inoffensively so: for there is, as I said before, a wrong Way of being in the right, an unacceptable Manner of performing the best Actions, re-

C

markable

markable in some ill-judging Persons, and much easier observ'd than describ'd. But Good is most apt to offend and to incur blame by little Inattentions and Improprieties respecting some smaller Circumstances. Good Men, in their over-much Zeal to be so, will be unseasonable now and then, not enough regardful of Times and Occasions, and so are censur'd for rash and impertinent; or the Good they mean to do, if not out of Time, is yet out of Character, foreign to the Condition and proper Business of their Station, and so passes for no better than interested Design; or else it may be too publick and expos'd in the Manner of it, and so lie open to the Charge of Ostentation: on which last Circumstance I would observe, that there is a Glare oftentimes in some very good Actions, that offends and scorches; and, seeming to bear hard upon other's Pretensions, sets the Envious to work to find out, if possible, the Imperfections belonging to them, and to proclaim them with most spiteful Aggravation.

Of all such Appearances we should beware, if we are minded to steer clear of Censure; and keep a strict Watch and Guard over our good Actions, those of any Importance more especially; yet not so strict, as to destroy the Grace and
Simpli-

Simplicity, which is their most recommending property, and defeat the very end propos'd by us. For there is a demure and guarded Manner, the proper Dress of Art and Design, that is very disgusting, and seldom fails to create Suspicion, which is near Neighbour to Reproach: as, on the other hand, there is a Way of Conduct, (known perhaps but to a few, and requiring rare Temper and Discretion to hit upon,) so artless and undefining, so well-suited to the Person and the Occasion, and so unexceptionable in every part, that Abuse can have no hold of it, but is overaw'd and put to the blush, and forc'd either to be silent, or to join in the general Commendation.

By conforming as near as we can to such Patterns, we shall bid fairest to escape Censure; whereto it will conduce likewise not a little, to preserve the Whole Character uniform and of a piece, free from Inconsistencies, and Things even of a suspicious or questionable Sort. For Good suffers often in bad Company, by being mix'd and associated with what is Ill, or esteem'd Ill, and so sharing in its Dispraise. It is scarce needful to add, that, the better to secure the like Treatment from others, we should ourselves be Examples of Candour and Kindness, very en-

gaging Qualities, and which rarely go unrequited ; whereas to abuse, and revile, and *speake evil of what we know not*, is the sure way to be recompens'd in our turn ; for such Debts are always paid back with Interest ; Malice will certainly not be behind in its Returns ; and even gentle and generous Dispositions, so provok'd, will sometimes forget their Natures, and let themselves loose to Reproach.

Still with all these Preservatives and Cautions, I cannot certainly warrant that *Good* shall not sometimes, by some unlucky Accident or other, *be evil spoken of* ; in which situation if it chance to find itself, what's fittest to be done then ? is the next most concerning Question. Follow the Example of some cholerick Spirits, and you will be ready to return such injurious Treatment, in the measure of *Zaccheus's* Restitution, fourfold ; and the Effect will be, that evil *Tongues* thus *set on fire* will wax hot apace, and what was at first but a hasty Spark will be soon blown into a Flame of malicious Contention : consult some more phlegmatick Tempers, and the Advice will probably be — neglect and despise wicked Scandal, carrying its own Confutation ; leave evil *Tongues* to tire out themselves, till their whole stock of wretched and contemptible Malice

lice be quite spent: neither can I approve of such Counsel, I must confess; esteeming it a sort of Inhumanity to be insensible to Reproach, and to slight that honest Fame, on which so considerable a part of our present Happiness is made to depend. Imprudence, past all doubt, it is to be regardless of that which does Mischief; for, alas, the most impotent Malice can do Mischief still; which, unluckily, is very easy to be done, and lies open to all sort of Capacities. Regard to one's Self therefore, to one's own Comfort and Repose, and Regard to Reputation, that chief Instrument of doing Good, (ever affected by ill Reports true or false,) are all so many Calls on us to endeavour to put a stop to them; which, for the most part, is not so impracticable as we may imagine. A moderate Proportion of well-tim'd Prudence and Discretion will go far towards effecting it; farther perhaps than a more eager and more importunate Endeavour: for there is an obsequious over-acted Complaisance, very insincere and very nauseous; which, in aiming to remove past Censures, is most apt to administer fresh occasions of Offence. A well-temper'd Humanity and Respect, (such as we owe and must pay the World, if we would live upon tolerable Terms with it,) will be the likelier Method to accomplish our purpose.

pose. Perhaps what has given Offence may really be faulty, in some respect or other, and, if so, is much better amended or laid aside, the exceptionable Part at least, than maintain'd and persisted in; or, if not faulty, it may yet be insignificant, and so a proper and easy Sacrifice to Charity; or if it chance to be important *Good* that is *evil spoken of*, such, for the most part, is easily made appear, and its Character, when unhappily mistaken, recogniz'd, by a patient hearing and removing of Mistakes, by friendly Endeavours to undeceive, and, as Occasions will admit, by good-natur'd Accommodations, and Compliances with Men's Humours: and I know no need there is to be asham'd of such Condescensions, for which we have the most unexceptionable and honourable Precedents upon Record.

After all this Care and Endeavour to keep clear of them, if yet *Offences will come* and will continue, why so they must; but *no to them by whom the Offence cometh*. — It must be own'd to be a Circumstance somewhat provoking, when good Men, leaving all Rewards else to lower Ambitions, seek only the Reward of Esteem and good Name for what they have well done, without being able to obtain it; the Effect of which
Disappoint-

Disappointment hath sometimes been, that they have grown less careful to be good, or, in their too much Resentment, have left off to be so; and at length entitled themselves to the Reproach, heretofore so unjustly cast on them. But this is sad Indiscretion surely; it is gratifying, and, in some sort, justifying cruel Enemies, and being grievously injurious to their Ownselves. The wiser Part, no doubt, is Perseverance, and patient Continuance in Well-doing, in hopes of more equitable Issues. These will come about one time or other in their Turn. An Event so unnatural and preposterous as *Good evil spoken of* cannot last long; Malice itself usually so contrives that it shall not; and, overcharging the Calumny, misses its Mark, or recoils back upon its own Head. Or if not so, yet Words and Opinions are volatile unfixed Things, wherein there is a sort of Vogue, and which, like most other Fashions, shift soon, and are succeeded by something the most opposite. And tho' this Rule fail us too, yet Time and a good Providence's Care usually sets all right; corrects Mistakes, and confirms Judgements and Pretensions well-founded. Good, in spite of unfortunate Depressions, will be uppermost at last, and come clearer and brighter out of the Cloud of Calumny. Or, which is a hard Case indeed, should Vir-

tue

they go to the Grave in Disgrace, yet then at last the Malicious themselves are commonly dispos'd to do it Justice; or, retaining their cruel Purposes, are unable to hurt it any longer: for Good is gone to Heaven, to associate with benevolent and kind Spirits, beyond the Power and above the Apprehension of evil Tongues; which have their Portion likewise in reserve for them, a Recompence in kind, *even mighty and sharp Arrows with hot burning Coals.*

But 'tis Time to come now to our intended Application of the Apostle's Precept — *Let not then your Good be evil spoken of:* in the observance of which Rule Societies, to be sure, are not less concern'd than single Persons; Societies of a higher Order in particular, whose Good is more open to Observation, more generally observ'd and discours'd of, and the Reputation of it of singular Importance to Themselves and to the Publick.

In these *Days of Rebuke and Blasphemy*, when the Best Things in the World, not excepting Religion itself, are become the Subjects of Reproach, who shall promise themselves Exemption; or pretend to say, that such Licence of Evil-speaking, if it has not already, may not hereafter

hereafter be felt in Places that should be most free from it; even in these illustrious Seats of Learning, which ought ever to be kept sacred *from the strife of Tongues*. If there be a good Work upon the face of the Earth, and one worthy of all Acceptation, it is that certainly wherein we profess to be employ'd, the improving ourselves and instructing others in every part of a religious and learned Education. *Let it not then be evil spoken of*: under this Character it is impossible it should be so; (No Malice was ever so outrageous or ridiculous;) but Mistakes and Misrepresentations may be made, and then it will be possible. Of these therefore it must be our Wisdom to beware, and of every Appearance that may give Occasion to them, adopting all such others as are of a contrary Tendency. I am not speaking of Appearances instead of Realities, but in Support of them. To be good is the first great Point, no doubt, (and so far, I trust, we are secure always,) the next is to appear and to be thought so; a Point not less essential than the former, in what relates to our Credit and our Usefulness. For certain it is that Good alone will not serve the turn; there must be Esteem and Opinion to go along with it, and give it its just Weight. It is Good well-approv'd and well-reported of that is necessary,

D to

to our Prosperity I will not say, but to our very Preservation, as a Seat of Learning. Nor need we be under Concern on this account; for as much as *Iniquity* (of the evil speaking sort especially) abounds, and *Love waxes cold*, yet till the World grows to be much worse than it is, I trust there will always be Prepossession, very general and very strong ones, in Favour of Learning and the Seats of Learning; which Wise Men will be studious to improve, and to preserve the Publick Approbation to what must owe its Subsistence to Publick Countenance. I speak the Sense, and the Practice too, I would hope, of all serious Persons, of all in any Degree of Station or Authority among us; whom it is neither needful nor becoming in me to commend, who have the Honour to stand in so near Relation to them: their own Hearts commend them, and the Tongues of others, whose Praises are better worth, and may redound more to their own and to the general Reputation. What I have farther to say shall be address'd to the Younger Part of my Audience, in a word or two of Admonition not unsuitable to the Occasion.

Young Persons, whether they are aware of it or no, have, and must have always, the Publick
lick

lick Reputation a good deal in their keeping: my meaning is, what they do well or ill, but ill more especially, will be likely to affect not themselves only, but this whole Community, and to derive a lasting Credit or Infamy upon it. This ought in all reason to be a Check upon their Conduct, and to make them very tender of doing any thing injurious to the common Reputation; which is too precious a great deal to be made the Sacrifice of idle Frolick, or libertine Disposition. I would be far from suggesting that such Things are frequent or prevalent among us; I hope and believe the contrary, and produce, as a Proof of it, the late peaceable and orderly Behaviour of our Younger Members, already notic'd by the Magistrate, and deserving of second Mention. Amidst Scenes of Tumult and Disorder, where Youthful Ardor so easily catches Fire, to have been Examples of Decency and Sobriety is very commendable indeed, shews much Concern for their own and the Place's Reputation, and does Honour to both. The like Conduct will secure the like good Effects for the future. Young Persons are plac'd here in the Publick Eye, to acquire the Character and Qualifications that must recommend them hereafter to Publick Favour; in which Situation the World, they must think,

will have something to say of them, Good or Ill, has a fair Pretence for saying it; and much it concerns them, for their own and the Place's sake, the Report should be in their Favour. For this purpose let them pursue the Good that is before them steadily and attentively, undiverted by Things foreign, and distinguish'd by the Simplicity, Frugality, and Modesty so suitable to their Age and Station. Expence and Extravagance, Faults chiefly incident to Younger Persons, are absolutely incompatible with the good Purposes of the Place; the very Imputation whereof must lie heavy, and the Practice, if ever it should become general, would be destructive to it. Of these, and the very Appearances of these, we should therefore beware: and let Young Men, who profess to be Learners, not set up to be Judges, or not decisive ones however, in the smallest Matters, and much less in questions of Strife and Debate. Remote from Publick Scenes, and unacquainted with the Parts acting upon Them, let them suspend their Opinions, or at least their Determinations about Publick Matters; and not embarrass their future Conduct by premature Declarations, useless at best, but often inconvenient. Or if rash unguarded Youth must needs be giving Judgments about Things which they know not, let them

them be candid and favourable ones; and as Themselves desire to be well spoken of, let them not *Speak Evil* of Others, of *Dignities* especially, which will draw on heavy Imputations of Ignorance or Somewhat worse. In a word, let them enjoy the Advantage of their Situation, and be just to themselves, and the Opportunities here afforded them; *whatsoever Things are honest, lovely, and of good Report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, thinking on these Things*; and confirm'd in them by the Encouragements and Examples of their Superiours.

Such Conduct will secure Reputation to Themselves and to these Societies; (without which Solemnities and Celebrations were Idle Pomp, of no use but to expose;) it will secure Reputation, and every other Good in consequence; and the Result will be this at last — that when Novelties have been tried for a time, and the World is grown sick of fantastick and fugitive Schemes of Education, Good Things will come round again in their turn; and the Preference be given, where it is due, to our old and safe Methods of Instruction. English Universities will resume once more their ancient Splendor, enjoying the Good Word and the Good Wishes of all true Judges of their Worth; and
that

that calm and flowing Course of Prosperity, in so lively a Manner represented by the ^a Prophet, shall receive its Accomplishment in These Places — *Tby Children shall be all taught of God, and great shall be the Peace of Tby Children; in Righteousness shalt Thou be established; Thou shalt be far from Oppression; no Weapon that is formed against Thee shall prosper; and every Tongue that shall rise against Thee in Judgement Thou shalt condemn: This is the Heritage of the Servants of the Lord, and their Righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord.*

a Isai. 54. 13, &c.

The E N D.

Pag. 7. l. 10. read thus — which, tho' it may rob us of some portion of our present Comfort, yet will not fail in the end to enhance our Reward.

